

VZCZCXRO6299  
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW  
DE RUEHLH #0208 1371430  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O P 161430Z MAY 08  
FM AMCONSUL LAHORE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3699  
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4425  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0250  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0073  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0620  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 1851  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 1534  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 4824

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAHORE 000208

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/16/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PML-N BLASTS APPOINTMENT OF NEW PUNJAB GOVERNOR

CLASSIFIED BY: Antone C. Greubel, A/PO, US Consulate Lahore,  
Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 14 President Pervez Musharraf, with at least the tacit agreement of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Zardari, nominated Salman Taseer, media mogul and former caretaker Federal Minister for Production and Industries, as Governor of Punjab province. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leadership reacted angrily to his appointment and labeled it a conspiracy being hatched in the presidency. Although political power is focused on the Chief Minister, the Governor's office is highly visible and prestigious. Nawaz Sharif is apparently taking this appointment as a personal affront. End summary.

¶2. (C) Salman Taseer is scheduled to be sworn in as Governor of Punjab province on May 16. Outgoing Governor Lt. General (retired) Khalid Maqbook submitted his resignation May 15. Taseer is a PPP party stalwart, businessman and media baron. He was last elected to office in 1988 as a Member of the Punjab Provincial Assembly but lost races for the National Assembly in 1993 and 1997. He served on the PPP Central Executive Committee and as the Central Information Secretary. After Musharraf came to power in 1999, Taseer was largely politically inactive until he was appointed to the caretaker government in November 2007.

¶3. (C) Taseer is a prominent businessman who owns several companies involved in accounting, management consultancy, securities, shopping malls and hotels, but is primarily known for his media holdings which include two major English language newspapers, The Daily Times and the Friday Times, and the Urdu language newspaper Aaj Kal. He also owns television news channel Business Plus. These media are generally balanced in their reporting despite Taseer's PPP allegiance and his strong enmity against Nawaz.

¶4. (C) The President has the constitutional power to appoint provincial Governors. Because of the fragile political situation, however, any gubernatorial appointment was bound to be controversial. According to Chaudhry Muhammad Zakra Ashraf, prominent businessman and senior PPP leader, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif originally insisted on nominating the next governor but PPP Leader Asif Zardari strongly objected since the PML-N held the Chief Minister's position. Zakra stated all three players had reached a tacit understanding last month that Zardari would nominate his own candidate but it would be someone palatable to Nawaz and Musharraf.

¶5. (C) PML-N's Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, one of Nawaz's closest advisors, held a May 15 press conference blasting Taseer's appointment. He claimed Taseer's nomination "is part of a

conspiracy being hatched in the presidency." PPP leaders replied that the PML-N had been taken into confidence and were now objecting to Taseer's nomination for no tangible reason.

¶6. (C) Khawaja Asif, a PML-N leader who resigned this week as Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources, told A/PO that Taseer has had serious differences with Nawaz Sharif since the 1980s and has been using "filthy" language against Sharif and his family. He added that Zardari had called him to say the PPP supported the President's appointment of Taseer as governor and Zardari never attempted to call Nawaz to gauge his opinion.

¶7. (C) Comment: PML-N is casting this as a slap at Nawaz hatched up largely by Musharraf, with the compliance of PPP's Zardari. However, Taseer has strong, long-term ties to PPP and it is unlikely Zardari was a passive actor in the decision on the Punjab governorship. Instead, this should be seen as another strong signal from Zardari to Nawaz that there is a cost to pay for withdrawing from the federal cabinet. End Comment.

¶8. (U) This cable was cleared with Embassy Islamabad.

GREUBEL